Tip Sheet: Using Sources, APA

Many students struggle when asked to write papers that include research, and one research-writing skill that often creates problems is merging research information—quote, paraphrase, and so on—into their own writing. This is a skill that takes practice to master, and lots of guidance.

To help, here are several tips students can use to help integrate their research in a way that allows the research to be an asset in their writing. While some of these tips might not apply to all assignments, generally speaking, these are the things students should do when they add research information to their writing.

This tip sheet will discuss APA style for integrating sources into your writing, but it does not provide a comprehensive look. For more information about APA documentation, you might want to review a current handbook that includes 2010 APA updates.

a. Introduce your source in the past tense. Introducing your source allows you to integrate source material with your own writing and allows readers to understand that information is being borrowed. When you introduce your source by author, often you need include only the author’s last name and publication date (by year only). Read the following examples:

- Marketing researchers Doe and Buck (2007) have argued that. . . pointed out that. . . suggested reported

- According to Doe (2007), an expert in product placement, this law. . .

- Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) showed that. . .
b. Where possible, use your introduction to demonstrate your source’s credibility. Including publication date, of course, helps assure readers that the information and ideas provided are current. In addition, including a word or phrase illustrating your source’s credentials also sends an appropriate rhetorical message, both about source quality and about you, the writer. If acceptable to your instructor, you might give an author’s full name, or the name of the publication. Note the following examples:

➢ Harvard economics professor Mary Jergenson (2007) has found that...  
➢ An article in Clinical Psychiatry News (2008) revealed that...

c. Quote or paraphrase your source accurately. Quotes require you to use exact language, while paraphrasing requires you to convey borrowed ideas or information in your own words. Consult an appropriate text and/or your instructor for help with this.

d. Use parenthetical citations effectively. Parenthetical citations provide the information that can help your readers identify the source on your References page—although this information might instead by provided when you introduce a source. Where necessary, parenthetical citation provide the each location—e.g., page numbers—of borrowed material. Read the following examples:

➢ Cancer researchers Doe and Buck (2008) have suggested that “diagnoses in this area are difficult to make, and incorrect diagnoses can lead to serious psychological consequences” (p. 33).

➢ Recent findings revealed that “diagnoses in this area are difficult to make, and incorrect diagnoses can lead to serious consequences” (Doe & Buck, 2008, p. 33).

NOTE: In the first quote the authors are named in the tag line, or introduction, and therefore not included in the parentheses at the end of the quote. In the second example, the opposite is true; because the authors are not mentioned in the introduction, they appear in the parenthetical citation.

NOTE: There are several other ways to provide internal citations. See an appropriate text—e.g., a 2010 handbook—for more information.

e. Respond to the source material in your essay. You might elaborate on it, explain it, refute it, and so on. Just be sure you respond. Read the following paragraphs, with the author’s response in bold print.
Direct Quote

Of course, the big question is whether executing convicted murderers is ever really justifiable. And some believe it is not. Anderson (2009), for example, has suggested that “killing people who have killed is never appropriate in a society that deems itself civilized; no matter how we rationalize it, it compromises us as a people” (p. 43). This argument cannot be overlooked or cast aside, for it provides us with a fundamental truth about capital punishment—it requires the conscious taking of another human life and thus diminishes us as human beings.

Non-quoted Information

Capital punishment, however, may well be an effective deterrent. Recent statistics from American Crime Quarterly (2009) have shown that the murder rate in each of the seven states adopting capital punishment in the last nine years has decreased, with these decreases adding up to a collective 27.3% (p. 27). While the death penalty itself may not account for this entire decrease, it certainly seems apparent that it has been a contributing factor—that it is indeed serving as a form of deterrent.

f. Create a References page entry for each source you use. Follow your instructor’s guidelines and/or consult the APA section of a good, current handbook to identify proper References page formatting.

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